

Rep. Honda Outraged By Census Confidentiality Breaches

Written by Mike Honda

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"Today, a Fordham University report confirms that the U.S. Census Bureau provided detailed information about individual Japanese Americans from the 1940 census to American surveillance agencies during World War II. Despite ongoing official denials, the Census Bureau played an integral role in the internment of 120,000 Japanese American citizens and legal residents and related instances of racial profiling during World War II.

"As I spent part of my childhood in Amache, an internment camp in southeast Colorado, this confirmation is deeply troubling. Wartime hysteria and officially sanctioned racial profiling was pervasive at the time. Releasing such detailed information, while perhaps lawful then under the Second War Powers Act, was deeply undemocratic and contrary to the fundamental American principle of protecting civil liberties. True to our democratic process, our nation looked back, admitted errors of our past, and apologized to Japanese American World War II internees for the internment.

"Shockingly, in 2004, it was reported that the Census Bureau provided to the Department of Homeland Security comprehensive reports listing Arab Americans populations by city and zip code. It is evident that we must remain vigilant in the protection of our civil liberties, especially in times of war. We must ensure that breaches of confidentiality against racial and ethnic minority groups are not repeated, particularly with respect to the 2010 Decennial Census.

"An accurate count of vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations is essential for lawmakers to formulate policies that adequately address their needs. Confidentiality breaches of this kind undermine the public trust, and can discourage minority groups, which are already difficult to count, from participating in census surveys.

"Accountability for historical wrongs is essential to moving forward. The Census Bureau must acknowledge these detailed disclosures regarding Japanese Americans during World War II and provide public assurances that these mistakes will never be repeated. I intend to explore any legislative remedies that are necessary to protect the confidentiality of census data."